SUMMARY MINUTES
WATER POLICY TASK FORCE
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

September 8, 2005
10:00 a.m.
SCAG Offices: San Bernardino A&B Conference Room

1.0 CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

2.0 PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There was no public comment.

3.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the April 14, 2005 and June 9, 2005 meetings was moved to the end of the meeting but then overlooked prior to adjournment. The Chair announced informally after adjournment that the minutes would be considered at the November meeting.

4.0 PRESENTATION ITEM FOR THE TASK FORCE

4.1 Landscape Irrigation and Water Conservation: Opportunities for Local Governments to Create New Water Supplies for a Growing Region

Tom Ash, Director of Conservation Alliances for Hydropoint Data Systems, and Tom Larson, a landscape and urban forestry expert, briefed the Task Force on the role of water conservation and the impacts it has on creating new water supplies because of water use efficiencies. Tim Blair, a Metropolitan Water District Water Conservation specialist, also contributed to the discussion. The speakers noted that in many respects water conservation programs are very low cost water supplies that require little if any infrastructure. Customer water bills can be lowered, too.

Government leadership is important, but public participation is crucial as partners. Greater success depends on growing public and landscape industry support. This format spreads the cost of conservation more broadly.

Droughts threaten water shortages and make conservation more important than ever throughout the country, emphasizing the need for good planning and stewardship. Continued planning and implementation in southern California will be the best antidote for a future water crisis. A part of this involves working realistically with public perceptions about what water is wasted and who wastes that water.

First wave of success has come with “hard” solutions: low flow toilets and shower heads. Still, more than half of domestic consumption occurs outside with irrigation of landscape. Public education and voluntary conservation efforts (examples of “soft” fixes) have not had

much success, however. Agency regulations have also had limitations because of difficulties in enforcement, public dissatisfaction and reductions of revenues from water sales.

A more effective strategy includes consumption targets (individualized water budgets), pricing to drive water efficiencies (rewards), customer support with rebates and low-cost loans, agency ratemaking to cover fixed costs independent of water sales and keep focus on system water efficiencies. Overall it is important to create fairness and incentives to motivate agency consumers.

The results, as seen in Irvine, have been very favorable: nearly 60% reduction in landscape water, 12% reduction in residential use, reduce urban runoff, agency revenue stability, lower infrastructure requirements for agency implementation, stable support for conservation activities and increased customer satisfaction. The panelists urged everyone to access an important water conservation website, www.bewaterwise.com.

The speakers noted that an important theme in water conservation is a campaign called "California Friendly", sponsored by Metropolitan Water District. This effort is promoting landscape plants and strategies that require much less water and maintenance. The economic impact of installing a California Friendly landscape is about an additional $.80 per square foot of outdoor area when compared with the more traditional landscaping plan that has a base cost of about $5-$6 per square foot.

The critical piece of the water conservation strategy is setting a water budget for an area. This is done by establishing the evapotranspiration rate for the area. This rate determines how much water needs to be applied to a particular area to avoid runoff and to water only the root zone of the plants. To irrigate more is wasting water. Water systems oriented to meet peak demands associated with the summer season and over irrigation are likely over-sized. Also, over irrigated soils are less able to infiltrate rainwater and reduce runoff.

With new development it is important to determine what kind of soil compaction has occurred. This will affect percolation rates for irrigation and determine the best kinds of plantings to use. Over compacted soils create a hazard for healthy plant life, given the soil's resistance to percolation.

Technology is now available in the form of smart irrigation controllers that can apply appropriate water in amounts and cycles, based on types plantings, climate and soil conditions. When monitored consistently by residents this technology can bring real savings in water and improvements in water quality. The key to installing these kinds of systems is delivering incentives to homeowners who can see the benefits of investing in a system that are initially more expensive but have lower long-term costs because of real continuing savings. Water agencies are the entities that are providing these incentives, along with new construction installations done by homebuilders.

New irrigation hardware and maintenance practices can be found by accessing the California Friendly website (www.bewaterwise.com).

The panel briefly discussed water saving products being developed outside of the U.S. that will enhance water savings even further than what is achieved currently with low-flush toilets, high efficiency washers and other similar products. These advances will enable

communities to comply with the requirements of A.B. 2717, a state action calling for greater water use efficiencies in urban irrigated landscapes. (The legislative intent can be found at http://www.cuwcc.org/landscape_task_force/ab_2717_bill_20040922_chaptered.pdf.)

The panelists concluded their remarks by restating that there are significant opportunities to achieve major water savings with urban landscape irrigation. These include "California Friendly" plant selection, smart irrigation controllers, local ordinances that model these goals throughout a community, water agencies that properly price water sales to discourage waste and improved training of landscape maintenance personnel.

5.0 CHAIR'S REPORT

In addition to thanking the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power for sponsoring lunch, the Chair noted that the State Senate had confirmed the appointment of Mary Ann Lutz and Bonnie Herman to the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. The Chair reviewed current water quality issues affecting the Malibu Creek-Las Virgenes watershed and the prospect of proposed discharge permit requirements overriding an approved TMDL standard for the Tapia Wastewater Treatment plant.

6.0 STAFF REPORT

There was no staff report.

7.0 TASK FORCE INFORMATION SHARING

There was no information sharing.

8.0 COMMENT PERIOD

There were no other comments.

10.0 ADJOURNMENT

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 1:10 p.m.

September 8, 2005 Attendance Summary:

Elected Members: Dennis Washburn (Chair), Harry Baldwin, Glen Becerra, Margaret Clark, Larry Forester, Keith Hanks, Shenna Moqeet, Lori Van Arsdale, Frank Zerunyan.

Liaison Members: Bo Cutter, Suzanne Dallman, Gerald Greene, Heather Merenda (via phone), Joe Mundine, Paul Thakur, Bill Wright.

Minutes prepared and approved by Daniel E. Griset, Sr. Regional Planner and Staff to the Task Force.